Mere Melodies

Edwin Meade Robinson

MERE MELODIES

ROBINSON

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By Edwin Meade Robinson
(*Ted Robinson*)

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THE ARTIST

WITH words he works, or with the yielding clay,
Lays on the colors, draws the facile line;
True to his art he fashions something fine,
But is unsatisfied from day to day.

What keeps him laboring, as never wrought
Or slave, or servant of a grinding Power?
What but the consciousness, with every hour,
Of this, the very pinnacle of thought—

"God, who created all things, cannot die;
And I, if I can make some lovely thing
From nothing, fit for this world's worshiping,
May somehow share His immortality!"

"THE YOUNG MAN'S FANCY"

WHEN Youth sits down to muse, on nights like these,
Or even ere the mating robin's song
Makes him forget that springtime was so long—
Even before the fruit is on the trees,
Or ever dusty paths bring memories
Of other summers—or the roses throng
The lattices, or all the woods are strong
With scents that make a memory of a breeze—

Even then, through half-drawn windows, the soft skies
Show stars that mind him of some woman's eyes—
The warm wind holds remembered breaths that hurt
His heart. Midsummer dews are tender tears,
And in the rustling of the leaves he hears
The soft susurrus of a silken skirt.

RESURRECTION

MUSIC, wise words and eloquence are good.
But he has learned the most of deeper things
Who, fleeing from the noise, has understood
The wisdom Silence brings.

Fair faces, lovely landscapes, pictures, seem
Most beautiful to seeing human eyes,
But ah! the greater beauty of the dream
That in the darkness lies!

And so the light and beauty that the spark
Of life enkindles, while we have our breath,
Perhaps shall be transcended in that dark
And silent thing called Death!

AN APRIL RHAPSODY

SOMETHING in this April daytime
lies to me and says it's Maytime—
Fools me, tells me it is playtime and a
time for idle resting;
Something beckons me to follow to the
hidden woodsy hollow
Where the redbird and the swallow
and the mockingbird are nesting;
Something sets my eyes to glancing, sets
my weary feet to dancing,
Starts the heavy heart romancing, as
it did when it was younger;
And the head that's dull and hoary, nods
to hear a fairy story—
Jaded palates taste the glory of the
Spring, and feel its hunger!

I can feel my lips a-sipping of the sweetness that is dripping
From the maples, as I'm tripping drunkenly through field and forest;
O thou woodland, still thy ringing! O thou April, loose thy clinging
Arms, and stop the siren-singing of the melody thou pourest!
I am one of Fortune's debtors, bound to town with golden fetters,
While the squirrels leap—my betters!—from their treedom to their turfdom:
Only are my nerves too crazy for my languid limbs—so lazy
That the distance, dim and hazy, cannot drag me from my serfdom!

Thus the springtime comes and twitters
to a soul it but embitters—
Holding up a prize that glitters to an
eye that's blurred and blinded—
Sending forth the scent of roses to the
grindstone-polished noses—
Flaming for an eye that closes, speak-
ing to the muddle-minded!
E'en the soul that would embrace her is
by force a money chaser,
And he couldn't but debase her with
his lewd, unhallowed kisses—
But, on weary knees a-creeping where he's
laid his youth a-sleeping
Don't you know that he is weeping
for the happiness he misses?

THE IMPERFECT

LADY, little lady, God has made you fair—
Put His skies within your eyes, His sunshine in your hair;
Robbed the lilies for your brow, the roses for your cheek—
Made your words of mockingbirds that carol when you speak!

Lady, little lady, God has made you sweet—
Filled with grace your lovely face, with grace your dainty feet;
Almost everything is yours that heaven could impart—
So it's odd, I think, that God quite left out your heart!

Lady—little lady! God left out your soul,—
Left just one small thing undone to make a perfect whole;
And, perhaps, His wisdom shows, in this lack in you—
You'd be worth too much for earth, were you good and true!

THE LAST CHANCE

(When one's nose itches, it is interpreted as a sign that one is about to kiss a fool.)

IT was the jester of a king,
Who, on a day, made shift to sing
A roundelay, a chanson gay, to please
the king his daughter;
It was the jester of a king
Who could not think of anything
But how her eyes were like blue skies
reflected in deep water!

It was the daughter of the king
Who bade the jester not to sing—
But to abide close at her side, and read
her signs and omens.
"I saw the crescent moon," she said,
"When it was straight above my head;
Whose visit is presaged of this — a
lover's or a foeman's?"

And many a sign he read her, pat,
For he was learned in lore like that;
  But one sure sign could she divine,
    of how his heart was aching;
And, of her grace, she pitied him,
Because his eyes with pain were dim,
  And wished an art to heal his heart,
    ere it came near to breaking!

"One omen, still, and then no more;
My nose," she murmured, "itcheth sore!
  What may it mean?" and she did lean
    so near, he trembled sadly.
"I know it not," he said. And she
Went from his presence, angrily.
  Oh, twice a fool and thrice a fool was
    he, to guess so badly!

THE PRINCESS PAYS A CALL

I

DOWN through winding ways unholy,
Comes a Princess, riding slowly,
Braving scandal, scorning censure;
In the city's secret places.
Side by side with dark disgraces,
Peradventure.

II

Close at rear, a sole attendant,
White with lace, with gold resplendent,
Hesitatingly advances:
Troubled, grave, and unenlightened,
All about him, to the right and
Left, he glances.

III

Still, to salve his inward chafing,
Not a word or glance vouchsafing
Rides the princess, slowly—slowly—
Slower still, the way she crosses,
By a darksome doorway pauses,—
Dingy, lowly.

IV

Then she flings her bridle to him
And a thrill of pain shoots thro' him,
As she slips, with lightning quickness
From her horse, and stands surrounded
With the tide-marks of unbounded
Sin and sickness.

V

Shrieks the door upon its rusty
Hinges, and the rotten, dusty
Staircase groans and creaks and mutters.
Like a swallow, upward always,
Thro' the narrow, gloomy hallways,
On she flutters.

. . . . . .

VI

'Neath the gables, grim and grimy,
'Neath the dripping eaves and slimy,
There's a quaint, half-hidden oriel:
Safe from modern innovations,
It has outlived generations
Immemorial.

VII

Thro' this window one rare pencil
Of God's light has graved a stencil
  On the bare boards of an attic;
How long have its walls ascetic
Witnessed struggles, grim, pathetic,
        Or dramatic!

VIII

On a dingy pallet lying
In the dark, alone and dying,
  The dim twilight shows a figure:
On the cover shows a blurred hand
Gaunt as talon of a bird, and
        Scarcely bigger.

IX

Shows a face, in sharp outlining
On the pillow, half reclining,
  Half aroused, with ear that listens
For a footfall, and a high-light
In his eyes that, thro' the twilight,
        Gleams and glistens.

X

Gleam and glisten, die and dwindle,
As a fire will fade and kindle
In its vain, expiring flashes,
Ere it flares up, grand in dying—
Puff! And here's a heap of flying
Dust and ashes!

. . . . . .

XI

Outside, in the narrow entry,
One gray rat who's standing sentry
Flees his post in sudden terror:
There approaches something human—
Not the aged, bent char-woman,
Someone fairer—

XII

Someone sweeter, taller, younger—
And the rat forgets his hunger,
And his jeweled eyeballs glitter,
As she begs him who is lying
In the dust and darkness—dying!—
To admit her.

XIII

There's a rush of silken vesture,
Then she taps, with regal gesture,
  On the creaking door, and standing
Still a moment, hesitating,
Hears her knock reverberating
        Down the landing.

XIV

There she stands, her loud heart throb-
    bing,
Then, in voice all broken, sobbing,
  Calls a proud patrician surname:
Hark! there echoes thro' the stillness
A rich voice, subdued by illness,
        Calling her name!

XV

Falls the darkness, soft and certain,
All around them, like a curtain—
  "Love 'tis thou!" "O love, I've
    waited!"
"Stay now till the light gives warning,
Thro' the window, of the morning
        Long belated."

XVI

"Stay till day? I stay forever!"
"Aye for me, dear one, for never
God nor man can take you from me,
Till the tide that surges o'er me,
And the mists that rise before me
Overcome me!"

XVII

"Nay, the tide shall ebb ere daybreak,
And the mists, swept far away, break
Like the salt spray on a lee shore!"
"Nay, the ebb shall sweep me, rather,
Thro' the mists that grow and gather,
To God's Sea-shore!

XVIII

"Closer, love, stay close beside me—
Death has given what life denied me—
Let me feel, who cannot see thee:
Let me breathe thro' those rich tresses,
Let me, from thy lips' caresses,
Drink of Lethe!

XIX

"All my life and all its losses,
All its strivings, all its crosses,
All the work and wishes in it,
All its pain and joy unsated,
All its pleasures were created
For this minute!

XX

"Closer—for my sight grows dimmer,
Closer—God! For one brief glimmer,
Just to see if thou art fair yet!
Wind that arm—ah! I had missed it—
Here, of old, a dimple kissed it—
Is it there yet?

XXI

"Tell me—does the moon shine brightly,
As of yore she blessed us nightly,
In the garden of the palace?
And the fountain—Venus, quaffing
Of the drops that trembled laughing
From the chalice?

XXII

"Tell me—do the simple daisies
Still unveil their haloed faces,
  Maid-like, on their grassy pillow?
And the dove that made her nest there,
Comes she still at noon to rest there,
        In the willow?

XXIII

"O the lilies tall and slender!
O the roses, and the tender
  Beauty of the sweet narcissus!
O the breeze that, soft and fragrant,
Wafted by—an amorous vagrant
        Throwing kisses!

XXIV

"O the days and nights of beauty,
Ere the hell that men call duty
  Light and life together banished.
Duty—ugly, grim, repulsive
Duty! All that filled life full, save
        Love, has vanished!

XXV

"Lost!—Love stript of all her raiment—
Lost!—And what is gained in payment?
  Is the kingdom safer, stronger?
Is it worth two young lives blasted
That the throne and crown have lasted
        One day longer?

XXVI

"Gold of love for tinsel glitter—
Nay, 'tis childish to grow bitter
  In an hour fulfilled with sweetness:
Hour of all earth's hours supernal,
Merging into Heaven's eternal
        Glad completeness!

. . . . . .

XXVII

"Sweet, the morning light encroaches,
See—how fast the day approaches!"
  "Nay, dear love, night's fallen newly:
Day is scarcely yet o'ershaded!"
"Love!—it dawned as twilight faded!"
        Ay, most truly

XXVIII

Day has come—she cannot share it—
Day has dawned in one dark garret!
  But the leaden, dead night presses
On the weeping girl who lingers,
Printing on cold lips and fingers
        Vain caresses!

XXIX

Darkness cloaks the royal palace,
But along the tortuous alleys
  Seems a blacker night to hover,
Where, behind a lowly portal,
Lies a maid with all that's mortal
        Of her lover!

XXX

Back thro' winding ways unholy,
Rides the princess, slowly—slowly;
  Dead to scorn—too pure for censure.
But unseen, a spirit-rider
Finds his heaven close beside her,
        Peradventure!

THE BOAST OF FRANÇOIS VILLON

I, VILLON, Bachelor of Arts,
Who rhyme of wine and love and hate,
Am king of poets, Knave of Hearts,
Light laureate of the fools of Fate!
Last night, I drank too deep—I ate
Too coarse and sang too loud—what for?
In all my moods, at any rate,
I never praised the hell called War!

I'd stab a cook to steal her tarts,
Cozen a king to kiss his mate,
Play in one drama many parts
My greed for your applause to sate!
With song have I burst through the gate
Of Murder—battered Gold's barred door—
Yet, though of lies and rape I'd prate,
I never praised the hell called War!

My sword from out its scabbard starts
  To help the small, to balk the great;
My bosom burns, my eyelid smarts,
  When Virtue sinks disconsolate.
  My Muse will rise in high debate
For Love and Lady, barn and store;
  Honor I sing, the King, the State—
I never praised the hell called War!

L'ENVOI

Prince! Though my often-beaten pate
  Drips sense or nonsense with its gore.
Think this of me, at death's drear date—
  I've never praised the hell called War!

A NOTION

THE things I have lost are the things
that have made my life—
The joys I have missed and the treasures I've given away—
The home I have known not, — the shadowy, ideal wife,
And the ghost children climbing my knees at the close of the day;
The heights I have longed for, but, crippled, have stopped at the base;
The battle ungained, and the far, unattainable goal—
The things I have gained are but chattels that laugh in my face,
But the things I have lost are the things that have fashioned my soul!

A BALLADE TO ORDER

A RHYME for you, O lady mine?
Why, all my rhymes are done that way;
For you I gather flowers, and twine
The blooms of June, the buds of May.
Each verse I scribble, day by day,
Is written with your tastes in view—
Each is, or be it grave or gay,
A rhyme for you.

A rhyme for you? Why, every line
Is yours already—roundelay,
Or sonnet sad, or fancy fine,
Or jesting jingle's joyous play.
Of course, I do these things for pay,
But are they less yours if I do?
I sell to others what must stay
A rhyme for you.

A rhyme for you? Well, maid divine,
  Since you insist, I must obey.
Lo, here I kneel before your shrine,
  And bask in beauty's brilliant ray!
  Your eyes of blue—what's that you
    say?
Your eyes are gray, and never blue?
  That's so, but how can one make
    "gray"
A rhyme for "you"?

A rhyme for you? All rhymes convey
  The selfsame meaning, always true;
Three words explain each one. And they
  Are "I'm for you!"

CONSERVATION

WHEN we have gone the darkened way that everybody must—
When you are but a lump of clay, and I a heap of dust;
When, after many a century, we two have dreamless slept,
Where will the joys I prayed for be—or where the woes you wept?

We stew and sweat and struggle on, and waste so many tears,
And strain our eyes to see a dawn that only dawns in years;
We labor for the thing that we and only we can use—
It comes! But for whose good shall be the thing that we must lose?

What happens to the effort vast that
bears fruit after death?
How shall I smell the rose at last, when
God has stopped my breath?
What is the use of all you do for what
must come too late—
Unless the Lord shall give it you beyond
the darkened gate?

THE LONESOMEST

THE desert waste is not the loneliest place,
Nor the mid-ocean, nor the mountain's crest,—
Ay, these are lonely spots for men to face,
But not the loneliest.

One feels alone amid the bustling crowd
Of strangers in strange cities, too—but not
So much alone, though Silence shrieks aloud,
As in one lonely spot

I know of. 'Tis the place you've visited
Once, with a Loved One—sometime, anywhere—
And visit once again, when years are fled,
And that One is not there!

BALLADE OF EASTER DAWN

THE gaunt trees black and naked stand,
And crackle, as the wind sweeps by;
Their boles break the horizon, and
Their branches arabesque the sky.
It is the dark hour. Shivering lie
The herds, in silence ominous—
Then dawn breaks, and there sounds the cry
Of "Resurrexit Dominus!"

Creeps then a soft light o'er the strand,
And dawn-birds preen their wings to fly.
Across the graying east, a band
Of brightness stretches, broad and high.
The early breezes cease to sigh—
A quiet, holy calm in us
Prepares us for the gladsome cry
Of "Resurrexit Dominus!"

Then, sunrise! And across the land
  Cloud-tints and flower-colors vie;
Earth glows with life at His command—
  The glory of the Lord is nigh!
  A new world born before the eye,
Heaven sheds its quickening balm on us,
  And angels' voices chant the cry
Of "Resurrexit Dominus!"

Lord! In a night our winters die
  And spring inspires her psalm in us;
Death yields to immortality—
  "Sic Resurrexit Dominus!"

UNDAUNTED

I NOTICED how the birds forgot
That Nature, but a while ago,
Stripped all their leaves away—and what
She left she wrapped in shrouds of snow.

For they responded, in the Spring,
To her first call as eagerly
As if her blows of chastening
Had ne'er despoiled a single tree!

The birds forgot their exile harsh,
And hurried to their woods again—
The blackbird to his thawing marsh,
The redbreast to the haunts of men.

O Thou who turned away thy face
And drove me forth with winter—Thou
Seest, Lord Love, how for thy grace
I still return! Spring beckons now!

UNKNOWN

"DOST thou love me?" said Death; and I shuddered, and cried, "I do not!"
And he smiled and replied, "I shall ask thee that question again.
In the day when thy lust after phantoms and toys is forgot
In the wonder of what I can give—I shall ask of thee then."

And I said, "I have known thee too well to be lover of thine."
But he answered, "What word hast thou then from thy friends in my thrall?"
I was silent. He whispered again, "In the day thou art mine
Thou shalt love me—they hate me who never have known me at all."

AN ABANDONED QUARRY

HERE was a quiet hillside, once in the days gone by,
A wide, green strip from the river's lip to the azure deeps of sky;
The ivy covered the boulders, the pines grew tall between,
And the moss spread o'er the granite floor with a carpet of softer green.

Here came men with their engines—oh, it was long ago—
And the hill's attire with ax and fire was stripped to the rock below;
They hewed at the very framework, till under the startled stars
The hill lay stark with the human mark of ugly and grievous scars.

Still they sweated and labored, many and many a day,
Blasting and sawing, heaving and drawing, riving the rocks away,

Till they robbed the hill of its treasure,
and little was left to gain—
There were gaping pits and shattered
splits, when man gave up his reign.

They left it gaunt and squalid—yes, it
was long ago;
Then the grass crept back by a secret
track, and the trees began to grow,
And the vines came back to their labor,
to curtain the naked walls,
And the hidden spring helped on the
thing with a series of waterfalls.

Ah, they were wise and tender, the ivy
and pines and moss!
The cruelest tear was a background rare
for their brushes to sweep across;
The old-time hill was lovely, but this
of the later time
Has a rugged grace on its furrowed face
that makes it a thing sublime!

Here is a wondrous hillside, richer by far
today
Than when man came with his pick and
flame and took its riches away!
And wrapped in a higher beauty, as hills
and hearts still are,
A lovelier thing than in that far spring
ere ever it bore a scar!

A MERE THEORY

DID spring never come—did the seasons
Not change, and the winters not pass,
Would love have its martyrs and treasons?
Would a lad give his life for a lass?
Would hearts break? Would men take damnation
In change for a summer of bliss?
Would a maid give her sweet soul's salvation
In fee for a kiss?

Did sunsets not glisten, I wonder,
Were roses not red, nor skies blue,
Would suffering put us asunder,
Or loving unite me and you?
Did the Maker of Worlds never fashion
Green trees and white blossoms that fall,
Would sorrowing move us, or passion
Make slaves of us all?

I dreamed of a world without color,
  Where sunrise came never, nor spring;
All gray, like a cloud-mist, and duller
  Than deserts, with no birds to sing,
All faces were blank—not despairing,
  Nor joyful—not happy nor sad—
Unlovely, unhoping, uncaring
  For good fate or bad!

And I prayed, "O God, grant them one flower
  Whose perfume may rouse them from sleep!
Though it wither and fade in an hour,
  Perchance they may miss it, and weep;
And weeping may bring them to laughter,
  And day will burst in on their night,
Till with grief, and the love that comes after,
  They win to the Light!"

And I woke, and was glad of the day-
time—
Gave thanks for the autumn and
spring—
For the loves that are born in the May-
time
And Septembers that teach us to sing.
And I said, "We should lose more, and
win less,
Though sadness and pain were forgot,
In a bleak world, cold, sunless and sinless,
Where Beauty is not!"

A PAGAN LOVE

THE gods were angry with Babette.
(With glad Babette—our mad Babette!)
For that each mortal man she met
Forgot whatever gods he knew!
Ah! Easy, easy to forget,
O glad Babette, O mad Babette!
Both maids and gods—and laws that fret,
And just remember you!

The gods were angry with the maid—
(The maid they made—the goddess maid)
The gods were angry and afraid
She'd steal their every worshiper;
So they took counsel to degrade
The goddess maid themselves had made—
To ask the gifts to be repaid
Themselves had given her!

And so the gods, who were to blame,
  Brought blight and shame upon her
    name;
What care the high gods for the fame
  Of them who make their own fame dim?
They broke her heart to play their game—
  (In virtue's name they wrought this
    shame!)
And even the little love-god came
  And carried tears with him!

The gods were angry with Babette—
  (With sad Babette—our bad Babette!)
And crushed she lies, and broken—yet
  I know what I am fain to do;
Though on thy ruin they are set,
  I dare forget, O sad Babette!
Forswear them all, without regret,
  And follow only you!

IN APRIL

IN April time, the lazy rhyme
Rings clearer, like a church-tower chime,
And March's snows with limping prose
Are all deserted, for the time.

In April time, the slush and slime,
The frost and frights, the gloom and grime,
The breeze that blows to freeze the nose
Are all forgot, in April time!

In April time, when Spring's at prime,
We live within some tropic clime—
We lie and doze and scorn our foes,
And live with friends, in April time!

In April time, the world's sublime,
There's no such thing as sin or crime—
  The brook that flows sweet peace be-
    stows
And sunshine glows in April time!

In April time, my darling, I'm
A marionette, a dancing mime—
  I prink, I pose, I point my toes—
And you're a rose—in April time!

A LETTER

I PLUCKED a violet to-day—
The first that I have seen this spring,—
And laid it carefully away.
'Twill be a scentless, withered thing
To-morrow—yet it must remain
Hidden, till you come home again.

I've found a little restaurant
That no one that we know has found.
I keep the secret, for I want
That place to be our trysting ground.
Not even I alone will roam
Back to that street—till you come home!

Old Smith has lent me, from his shelf,
His rarest, most delicious book;
And I have not allowed myself
One little surreptitious look
Between its covers—lest we lack
One mutual joy, when you come back!

I wrote a song I liked, last night,
  But did not send it as I should;
I'm loath to have it see the light
  Till you pronounce it bad or good.
Ah, love! Song, spring—ay, life is dumb
And cannot speak until you come!

BALLADE OF THE "AWKWARD AGE"

WHEN skirts are lengthened past the knees,
  And curls are prisoned in a braid·
When any close observer sees
  A coltish length of limb displayed;
  When needless blushes glow and fade,
And heedless laughter ebbs and flows,
  That is the age girls can't evade—
Too old for dolls, too young for beaux!

Full of small fears and jealousies,
  Timid, and easily dismayed;
As changeful as an April breeze—
  Brazenly modest, wildly staid;
  Pickles and soda, lemonade,
Romantic friendships—deathless foes—
  With such weird toys her games are played,
Too old for dolls, too young for beaux!

With others never at her ease,
  Alone, her freaks aside are laid,
And all her graceless gaucheries
  Leave her, no longer on parade.
  What dreams are these of flashing blade
And prince and prancing steed—who knows?
  What poems conned, what hopes betrayed—
Too old for dolls—too young for beaux?

L'ENVOI

Princess uncrowned! Let it be prayed
  That, as your springtime fancy goes,
You find Him worth the vows you've paid—
When you're no longer, little maid,
  Too old for dolls, too young for beaux!

WONDERING

WHEN today goes,
May goes—
May, with all her freaks and fancies,
Wiles and wondrous necromancies;
May, that clothed the bare boughs for us,
May, that scattered blossoms o'er us
To the mating birds' love chorus—
May dies,
When today dies!

As a tune's born,
June's born.
Like a lazy, swaying measure,
June comes, pouring out the treasure
And the wealth of her adorning;
April was the year-dawn's warning,
Maytime was its brilliant morning—
June-time
Is its noontime!

As all things go,
  Springs go.
Summers come, and winters kill them;
Birds sing, and the snowstorms still them.
Love, that's born of April weather,
Frosts will slay. I wonder whether
Ours will last a year together?
  Springs die—
Do all things die?

THE SUPREME MOMENT

COULD I fold up the book of the Present
To-night, and steal back through the gloaming,
As a dove flutters back to its homing,
Wing-weary, wide-wandered and worn;
Could the past open arms to receive me
I would go, not to boyhood, believe me,
Not to childhood, and not to the pleasant
Dream country of young Life-at-Morn;

And I know I would not seek the places
Where First Love her pure bud unfolded,
Nor stay where her blossom was molded
To feed the fierce flame of Desire;
And I would not return to the fashion
Of folly and pleasure and passion,
Nor seek to revive the old faces,
And kindle anew the old fire.

All these I would leave far behind me—
The pain and the pride and the pleasure,
The triumphs of life, and the treasure
Of love and the heartbeats of youth;
I would ask not a moment for laughter,
For strife, and the peace that comes after,
Nor the wealth of the world that would blind me
To the light of the spirit of truth.

But oh! I would know, when I found it,
The garden I walked in, one morning,
Half way between daylight and dawning,
In grass that was heavy with dew;
(As my eyes had been heavy with weeping,
Wide open all night, and unsleeping.)
A garden with high walls around it
And trees where the light sifted through.

For there as I wandered, unheeding,
Unhappy, unthinking and bitter,
My dull eyes were caught by a glitter
Of light in the heart of a rose;
I marked how the wet petals glistened—
Then my ears grew acute, and I listened
To a voice that seemed praying and pleading—
What voice I knew not, but God knows.

So I stopped and I looked and I hearkened,
And the sunlight came brighter and brighter,
Till it seemed that my spirit grew lighter,
And my heart was unburdened of wrong,
As a bird-note, a wind-note, a tree-note
Combined, and the three struck the keynote
Then the world, in an instant undarkened,
Burst forth in a triumph of song!

And I understood, and joined in it,
  Each pulse beating time to the meter,
  Each throb growing finer and sweeter,
    As some new tone leapt into birth;
  Till the myriad notes all agreed to
  Strike the one chord that all things are
      keyed to—
And, in that ineffable minute,
    I was one with the whole of the earth!

And all my life long I have waited,
  Unmindful of guerdon or laurel,
  To hear just one strain of that choral,
    And join in that music once more;
  I have sung, but the notes were all
      broken,
  The depths of the song still unspoken,
The longing unheeded, unsated—
    It will never return as before.

Just once, ere the clouds rise before me,
And the many-oared Galley of Silence
Bears me off to the Fortunate Islands—
Just once, and no more, I shall pray
That the gods give me this for my warning—
One glimpse of the joy of that morning;
Let the waves of world-music roll o'er me
As they did on that wonderful day!

BETTER FAITH

SOME people think that God, my Lord,
Comes not until He is invited;
As if Omniscience could afford
To stand outside and think he's slighted!

As if my Lord would come not in
Like winds and rose-scents, blithe, undaunted!
As if a Saviour could begin
To grouch because He wasn't wanted!

I did not ask thee, Lord, to place
Thy foot across my prideful portal—
Yet thou wilt come, if by the grace
Of God thou'rt something more than mortal!

THE WAY OF HOPE

WE call the season late,
Or complain it comes too soon;
But in the spring, the birds still mate,
And we see the changing moon.
Surprise-days know their reason,
Each summer hath its fall—
Did you ever know a season
That didn't come at all?

The dawn of morning waits,
The dawn of love delays;
Life with its luring oversates—
Death threatens—and betrays!
But did you ever know an end
Of pleasures that enthrall—
Death, winter, or an untrue friend
That never came at all?

The old world whirls around,
  The pendulum swings back
The thawing glebe, the frozen ground,
  The harvest, or its lack;
But we, who feel hell's hopeless stress,
  Its wormwood and its gall,
Cannot believe our happiness
  May never come at all!

MAKING THE BEST OF IT

("I have been half in love with easeful Death.")

As one who, wedded for convenience' sake,
Must try to make his wayward heart forget
The dear desire on which its hope was set;
And, after struggling with himself to make
A virtue of necessity, can take
Pleasure in his new part, still the regret,
And finally win to a joy that yet
He had not dreamed in sleep, or hoped awake—

So I who, with a passion overfond,
Clung to and loved and lusted after Life,
Now getting one clear message from beyond,
That I must shortly take cold Death to wife,
Grow used to her, and walking at her side
Become enamored of my unsought bride!

FEBRUARY 23

WHEN Death shall touch me with his kindly hand,
And beckon me to take his wondrous way
Through the deep shadows to the larger day,—
If he shall ask me where in all that land
I choose to tarry, I shall understand
That I am free. I know what I shall say;
I know how eagerly my soul shall pray
To go and seek that spacious realm and grand—

That leafy forest of old Arcady,
Where nightingales make melody, and where
The Hamadryads have their cool retreats;
Where fair Hyperion and Endymion be,
And Pan yet lives immortally. And there
Enthroned and laureled I shall find John Keats!

THE MAGICIANS

WHAT do we care for sunny or wintry weather,
Comrades of mine, fair printed and bound in leather?
Tempests may come and thunders may crash and clatter,
Snows may descend and cover the flowers —what matter?
We make our own fair days when we get together!

Answer me, Burns! Does the black frost blight your heather?
Answer me, Keats! Does your nightingale moult a feather?
Winter, forsooth! We speak, and the robins chatter!
What do we care?

Comrades of mine, whose spirits death
could not tether—
Ye are as gods, whose power is constant, whether
Rains fall or snows! You sing and the storm clouds scatter;
One little song, and I hear the June rains patter.
You in the upper world, and I in the nether—
What do we care?

JUNE

JUNE!
What wonderful thing thou canst be!
What a magic is made by thy moon—
What a mystery floats on thy sea!
How we love thee, yet know thee not—
we
Who are mazed by thy mystical boon,
Explain us thy power, ere thou flee—
June!

June!
It is naught that we hear or we see:
It strikes us at midnight or noon,
Thy secret, mysterious plea,
We bend an idolatrous knee
To thy dreamy, ineffable tune,
We are witched, we are conjured by
thee,
June!

June!
  Thou art fragrant and fearless and free!
Thou hummest a lullaby rune
  And thou takest regret for thy fee!
  The weird that each lover must dree—
It cometh too soon—ah! too soon!
  Thou art swift, thou art sweet—what
    is he,
June?

The Princess I'm longing for—she
May wait where the nightingales croon,
Wilt help, if she's longing for me,
June?

THE INTERPRETERS

I NEVER heard a nightingale
  Pour forth her music to the dark;
  I never heard an English lark
Tell to the dawn her blissful tale.
I only know the piping quail,
  The sparrows, chirping in the park,
  The chattering bluejay's raucous bark,
The mimic catbird's drawling wail.

And yet, though I have never heard
  Their notes—now in the winter time
I know each golden-throated bird,
  And all its melody sublime;
Hark! Shelley's Lark the song repeats!
Answers the Nightingale of Keats!

THE LOST ESTATE

ONCE on a time, ere the summer was ended,
All of the colors of sunset were blended
Just for my joy; and the dawnlight came glowing
Just to delight me—the summer breeze blowing
Was my own servant, that loyal attended.

Don't you remember, as homeward we wended,
(Ere the hearts broke that can never be mended)
We dubbed "our estate" all the green things a-growing,
Once on a time?

Ours no more now. Some stern god we've
offended;
Well—it is well; they're no longer so
splendid—
Crops in the sowing, and little streams
flowing,
Cattle low lowing and distant cocks
crowing,
Whisper not, smile not, the tale that they
then did,
Once on a time!

THE POET

THE world was beautiful before his eyes—
It gave him youth and happiness and Spring:
And for these generous gifts he tried to sing
A song of thankfulness. But, cold and wise,
The world was only moved to criticise
The boyish errors of his caroling.
Then the world gave him love. And for this thing
Again he sang—to unresponsive skies.

Then spun the earth about and broke his heart,
Withdrew her gifts and did him bitter wrong,
And ere he died, his poet's soul ordained
One last essay of his rejected art.
And, in the anguished sweetness of that song
All he had lost the world that crushed him gained!

REGAINED

I DREAMT that I had passed beyond the night,
To where the morning gives us back again
The things we mourn. There saw I Milton, plain,
And Homer, clothed with more than mortal sight,
Gazing upon each other in the light:
Beethoven, listening to the refrain
Of joy the stars were singing; freed from pain,
The Christ sat in his kingdom, robed in white.

And each had found his sweetest Yesterday—
A woman laughed above her still-born child,
That laughed again with living eyes of blue:
And eagerly I trod the blessed way
To where the very height of heaven smiled—
And came upon my wasted youth, and You!

MAGIC

IS the city full of noise
  That offends your weary ear?
Do you long for quiet joys
  In a country far from here?
  Surely, we can find it, dear—
    You and I.
Shut your eyes, and lo! we go
To the pleasant land we know,
  Underneath our private sky,
    You and I.

Do you shiver with the cold—
  Shudder with the north wind's tune?
Let me have your hand to hold,
  Closer! Presto—it is June!
  And this summer afternoon
    You and I
Own alone. Our magic words
Conjure bees and buds and birds!
  Who know Junes that never fly?
    You and I.

Is there naught beneath the sun
  New to hear or new to see?
Music stale and art ill done?
  Let the others weep—not we!
  For we have a grammarye,
    You and I,
That can make the old tunes new
And the whole world fair to view—
  We've what riches cannot buy,
    You and I.

Love's a land inhabited
  By its two liege lords alone;
Love's a June whose roses red
  Fade not, though the year has flown.
  Love's a world that we may own,
    You and I;
And the music of a heart
And the beauty, strange to art,
  That we know can never die,
    You and I!

A TWILIGHT FANCY

IT is the twilight tryst, when Day meets Night,
And stops to kiss her, ere he goes his way;
The silent world stands breathless at the sight,
And tries to hear the words the lovers say.

Lo! in that large embrace the two are one—
One for an instant, then the Day is gone.
Then Night keeps lonely vigil for the sun—
She knows that they will meet again, at dawn!

A TYPE

HER soul is the soul of a Maltese kitten—
A kitten that loves to be petted and fed;
That begs a caress till your heart is smitten
With tenderness, as you stroke its head;
That never will follow you through bad weather—
Only in comfort she cuddles and purrs.
Soul? We'll ignore such a thing altogether—
But oh! That exquisite body of hers!

Her mind is the mind of an innocent savage,
Logicless, formless, but full of guile.
You argue in vain, for she knows she can ravage
The whole of your love with one flashing smile,

But her fancies she states as positive knowledge,
And woe be to you if you tell her she errs!
Her learning was gained at her own will's college—
But oh! That wonderful body of hers!

Her heart is the heart of a Geisha, blended
With the heart of a cruel child at play;
Or you'd say she has none, but it's broken and mended,
(As she'll tell you herself) many times a day.
Heart of a tiger, heart of a tyrant,
That never a noble emotion stirs;
To gain such a mean thing who'd be an aspirant—
Except for that maddening body of hers?

Soul, mind, heart—they are naught, who
shall heed them?
She has enough and to spare, it seems,
Others may miss them—but she doesn't
need them—
Look on her once, and she'll vex your
dreams!
Cavil we not—be our wants more simple;
Pagans, we join with the worshipers
Of the grand curves, joining dimple to
dimple,
That bound that beautiful body of hers!

A MELODY

ALL the dooryard's denizens,
Chatter here from dawn till night,
Twittering wrens and clucking hens,
Pigeons gurgling soft delight;
Quiet noises, murmuring tunes,
Lisping whistlings, whisperings—
Then—that special voice of June's
Rose-breast Grosbeak sings!

Robin's song unheeded flows—
Here's his master's melody!
See him pose—the rascal knows
He can sing, it seems to me!
Dressed for concert—black-and-white—
But original, at that—
With his white-and-black, a bright
Rosy red cravat!

That's his dress, but ah! his song!
  Who shall ever tell of it?
Sweet and strong (but not for long—
  When the nest is full, he'll quit).
This is summer's singing soul,
  This is music's self on wings;
June is June, complete and whole,
  When the Grosbeak sings!

EVANESCENCE

I BELIEVE me, never grieve me
When a happy hour is ended—
Could I keep it for a lifetime, I would
never feel its worth:
Did a sunset last forever, who would
think of it as splendid?
Would a lark enjoy his soaring if he
never touched the earth?

As the bliss of any kiss of
Love is sweet because it's fleeting,
Oh, be glad your hour must end—that
love nor pleasure tarrieth!
Oh, rejoice that there is parting to create
the joy of meeting—
And that Life can gain its glory from
the welcome shade of Death!

A SONNET OF GUINEVERE, THE QUEEN

EXCALIBUR lies eaten up with rust,
Arthur and Launcelot are turned to clay;
Elaine and Vivien have passed away,
And Mordred ne'er will break another trust.
Merlin, the Wizard, is a heap of dust—
But, as knights fight and lightsome dames betray,
While winter sports to spoil the buds of May,
Queen Guinevere lives, as she always must!

For ah! her hair is golden like the sun,
And ah! her bosom is more white than milk—
And ah! her eyes are like blue skies above!
And we have wandered, each and every one;
We went in sackcloth, as she went in silk—
And she has found the Holy Grail of Love!

CLOUDED

THE sun shines and no clouds are in
the sky.
A bracing quality is in the air.
The lake, so blue and quiet, over there,
Knows now at last that winter has gone by,
And gleams with springtime blueness; therefore, I
Finding that life is sweet and the world fair,
Had felt a song, and started to prepare
A merry lilt of mirth and jollity—

And then—I heard that you were suffering,
Somewhere, apart from me. And then the day
Was dull and dreary, and the clouds came creeping
Across the sun. And there is naught to sing—
I cannot write a witty verse, nor gay,
While somewhere in this world you sit a-weeping!

THE TWO SINGERS

I

FAR away and long ago, once upon a time,
Two great poets spent their days doing things in rhyme.

One was old and one was young; both won royal praise,
Though they wrote and sang their songs in such different ways.

II

One knew naught of wisdom—no philosophy—
Had no lesson he would teach, dogma none—not he!

Didn't have a mission—wondered what that meant.
Never wrote a sermon urging sinners to repent.

Sang because he had to sing—for each
skylark note,
Rising from his heart of hearts, crowded
in his throat;

Sang because the sun was up—sang as
sing the birds;
Sang the music in his soul, setting it to
words.

When he felt like singing, poured his
blithe strains out,
Having but a small idea what 'twas all
about.

But when he had finished, wrought with-
out design,
People found a golden truth, hid in every
line;

Messages of hope and love, faith to heal
despair—
And the singer thought that someone else
must have put them there!

III

Far away and long ago, the other poet wrought
Far into the night, to rhyme the jewels of his thought.

The wisdom of the ages lay within the singer's ken,
Labored he to choose the way to give it unto men.

No musician he, but made of stronger, sterner stuff,
Hewing from the native rock diamonds in the rough;

Had no time to polish them—long past was his youth—
Couldn't stop for form because he'd such a load of truth.

Yet, when he had finished—wonder now at this—
People found sweet melody in every line of his!

Phrases smooth as lovers' words, verses
in such tune
As a breath of forest wind redolent of
June;

Stanzas that went leaping with a wealth
of cadences
Like a rippling mountain brook among the
cedar trees.

. . . . . .

Far away and long ago, once upon a time,
Rhyme made one sing true—and truth
taught the other Rhyme!

ALLOY

IF all the birds in all the trees
  In all the places where it's June
Combined their myriad melodies
  In one triumphal tune—
If every bird was glad to sing,
  And every man was glad to hear—
Would not some note of sadness ring
  In every listener's ear?

If all the tears that women weep,
  And all that men refuse to shed
Were made one bitter draught—as deep
  As graves yawn for their dead;
And if that cup were mine, to drink
  Its everlasting anguish up,
There still would be a taste, I think,
  Of sweetness in the cup!

If you have not discovered this,
  You have not largely lived, I fear—
That spring may be, with all her bliss,
  The sorrow of the year;
And love, that tempers heart and brain,
  Makes every being on this earth
A little happy for his pain,
  And sorry for his mirth!

YESTERDAY

TOMORROW never comes—today is dull,
Regrets and fears are all the two can hold;
But yesterday—ah, yesterday, how full
Of perfect gold!

Nothing can spoil it, now; and every year
Adds to its beauty, wipes its tears away,
Like the dear dead that death makes doubly dear
Is yesterday!

God gives today to live as best we can;
He gives tomorrow—only not to all,
But yesterday's his finished gift to man,
Though death befall.

Tomorrow looms in gloom; today's events
In dragging commonplaceness pass away,
Life's conjugation has one Perfect Tense,
'Tis Yesterday!

THE SOUTH WIND

I THOUGHT of you this afternoon, sweetheart,
O, little sweetheart that I've lost so long!
It was the wind that rent a rose apart
And minded me of a forgotten song;
Do you remember "Wind and Roses"?—think!
Whatever now you love, you loved it then,
And at its simple notes, the rose's pink
Leapt to your cheeks; I'll sing it once again!—

"The South wind tells his secrets to the rose,
She nothing answers, but she nods and smiles;
She nothing answers, but content he goes
Upon his way across midsummer miles.

He could not stay, and yet upon his wings
And mingled with the freshness of his breath,
The haunting essence of her sweetness clings—
The memory of her perfume tarrieth!

"And all across the happy, sun-loved hills
And all along the trodden country ways,
And through the crowded cities, where he fills
The hearts of men with thoughts of other days;
Each one that feels his breath upon his cheek
The tender secret of his fragrance knows,
And men will say—although they may not speak—
'O happy South wind—he hath kissed a rose!'"

I thought of you this afternoon, sweetheart—
O, little sweetheart that I've lost so long!
The South wind rent a late wild rose apart,
And minded me of a forgotten song.
And so I know if any fragrance fine,
If any sweetness in my song endures,
It is not there by any grace of mine—
It is the breath of that last kiss of yours!

SHAME

I KNOW how husband and wife shall meet,
When the parting of death is ended;
I can dream how a soul finds solace sweet
With Love and Eternity blended.
I see how a friend shall find his friend,
And a foe shall avoid his foe;
How useless quarrels and wrongs shall mend,
That have parted us here below.
I can figure the erring son's embrace,
And the joy of the wounded mother—
But how shall lovers stand face to face
Who have lied to one another?

THE OLD THINGS

ONCE I believed in God. And then
I doubted him—and later still
Threw him away. And foolish men
Applauded as I cursed; until
With patient search for something lost—
(How many the same path have trod!)
Through tears and fears, at awful cost,
I found another, better God.
And yet, sometimes at night, I find
The old one running in my mind.

Once I believed in You. And then
I doubted you—and later still
Threw you away. Unknowing men
Applauded as I cursed you; till,
With hopeless search for something lost,
And pain that you know nothing of,
With youth and youthful soul the cost,
At last I found another love.
(And yet sometimes in dreams I start
To find you tugging at my heart!)

REBIRTH

I SAW the river hasten to the sea,
The birds fly southward; and the sun make haste
To hide behind the mountains of the west—

Apace, apace! And so it seemed to me
That men across life's desolate, stricken waste
Were also hurrying—whither, to their rest?

I saw the ocean fill the clouds, and swell
The rivers; saw the birds come back in spring;
And after night the sun arose again.

'Tis well, ye waters! Works of God, 'tis well!
Ye go and come upon His laboring,
And ye, too, shall return, ye sons of men!

PREMATURE

THERE'S a brown leaf on the maple,
though the summer's just begun;
And rusty is the yellow wheat, and
dusty is the clover.
The rose has withered all too soon be-
neath the Junetime sun,
The robin has forgot to sing, though
June is scarcely over.

The dawn upon the lawn will find the
dew no longer pearly,
The sunset tints have awful hints of
autumn in their hues;
God help this laboring world of ours when
summer comes too early—
And takes from us the joy we can so ill
afford to lose!

There's a white hair in your head, dear,
though your life has just begun;
There are lines upon your forehead—
there are scars upon my heart.
The things we should be doing now, we
have already done,
And our splendid journey's ended, ere
we should have made a start!

God help the soul that blooms too young,
the heart that learns too quickly!
God pity them when life at noon seems
drawing to its gloaming!
When the buds that should be bursting
are all withered, pale and sickly—
And tired doves, ere half their flight, go
fluttering to their homing!

ALONG THE BOTTOMS

THE day wanes; now you need not dip an oar.
But let the sluggish stream propel your boat
Down to its landing place, and as you float
You'll cast a few times toward the reedy shore,
But mostly you will idle. Like a floor
The bottoms stretch beside you, where you note
The red-winged blackbird, "chucking" in his throat,
And a kingfisher in the sycamore.

And here are small springs, lined with tender cress,
Mint, and the trillium's petaled trinity;
And see the bittern, booming as he drinks!
Laziness takes you now, and happiness—
But listen, from that scrubby willow tree
The liquid ecstacy of bobolinks!

THE VOICE

AH, how her voice was sweet and rich and low!
Even if she called across the room to me,
The words were velvet whispers. Silently
She stepped and softly spoke, and made me know
The strength of calm. Each ripple of the flow
Of liquid music somehow seemed to be
More eloquent than all the minstrelsy
Of all the years. And that was long ago.

And now men say her voice is hushed—their ears
Being deaf to that which rings so loud in mine;
Loud now, and louder through the dragging years,
Crying across that clouded boundary line,
Until I hear naught else, and wonder how,
So low in life, it is so clamorous now!

LOOKING A BIT AHEAD

BEYOND this little world I know,
I cannot think how life may be—
A life made up of memory,
Where no new flowers grow!

I think I do not care to live
Where all my dreams are of the past,
And where my future is the last
That life could ever give.

Unless another life may ope
Beyond the life to dead men given—
Unless there be a Super-Heaven,
I do not want to hope!

MIDSUMMER INLAND

CALLING—calling!
Oh, can't you hear it, the call of the sea?
Ringing through mountain and valley, and falling
And rising and roaring, but calling—still calling
Always to me!

League on league lies the land between
Forest and river and waterless waste;
But ever the sea gulls cry, "O haste
Over the dusty miles to the green
Wide water where we have been!"

Somewhere—anywhere, out of all this
Dust and drought where I blink and choke;
Out of the riot of noise and smoke—
Only to feel the sea wind's kiss,

To taste the salt of the shimmering
spray,
To join in the words of my mother-
speech,
And hear what the breakers say
To the shingle and shell and the sands of
the beach,
And the whitecaps shouting, each to
each
Across the bay!

O to be one with the waves this night!—
To join in their long ranks, hand in
hand,
In a desperate charge on the rocks and
the sand,
With spears of silvery spume to smite!

And to part and meet in the wild retreat
And the shuddering splash of the rush ashore—
The dash up the shivering shale, and the roar
Through the shelving shallows—then back to the sweet,
Deep, shining sea once more!

Calling—calling!
Hark, how it rises, the call of the sea!
Over the distance still rising and falling
Loud and soft, low and long, calling—still calling
Always to me!

BEAUTY

WHO keenly looks in eyes of mortals sees
Three wonderful and awesome mysteries.

The steady gaze of eyes grown old and fond
Of looking at the great unknown Beyond;

The tenderness and joy, half-understood,
In her young eyes that dreams of motherhood;

The wide, unwinking wonder and surprise
And purity in little babies' eyes!

THE THREE WISHES

IN the Fairy country
Of Once-Upon-a-Day
Lived three lovely maidens, long ago and
far away.

Came an Old Witch to them,
Once upon a time—
These things often happen in the land of
love and rhyme.

"I can grant your wishes"
(So the old dame said),—
"Only one wish, though, for each.
Now, girls, wish ahead!"

Then the first made answer—
"I have love and health,
Only one thing I require; lo! I wish for
wealth!"

Then the second answered—
"I have wealth above
Power to count, and therefore, if you
please, I wish for love!"

But the third was weeping
In her flower-dish;
"Love and wealth I have—I only wish I
had a wish!"

ENTER—AN IMMORTAL

(Bishop Brown of Bristol, England, threatens to resign unless people desist from bringing crying children to church.)

BISHOP Brown of Bristol Town,
He's loved by all the widdies.
He likes old maids and wealthy blades—
But he doesn't care for kiddies!
He'll take his tea with a K.C.B.
And rave o'er his plate and crystal—
But the sight of a child will drive him wild,
This Bishop Brown of Bristol.

Bishop Brown of Bristol Town
Proclaims in all his sermons,
We should call brothers all the others
(Except, of course, the Germans).
And all and each we ought to reach,
And cherish and assist all—
Except, perhaps, the baby chaps,
Says Bishop Brown of Bristol.

Bishop Brown of Bristol Town
  Has aimed at babes—and winged 'em!
This text he flees—"Suffer ye these
  To come into my Kingdom!"
The babies cry—ah, let them die
  By cannon, sword and pistol,
But not disturb the speech superb
  Of Bishop Brown of Bristol!

IDEALS

I

I LOOK to find Perfection; and the mocking stars disclose
A soiled spot on the lily and a canker in the rose,
A lovely woman burdened with self-conscious unrepose.

II

I look for Wisdom; and I see a preacher, fresh from school,
Lay off the way to heaven with a compass and a rule;
A doctor that's a charlatan—a teacher that's a fool.

III

I look for Virtue; men are flies who lose
their souls for honey;
The women see their draggled wings, and
laugh and think it's funny,
And scorn their fallen sisters—and wed a
man for money!

IV

I look for Inspiration; from what cess-
pools poets pump it!
Why, even Kipling tootles on a penny
pewter trumpet,
And Homer sang the Trojan war — a
struggle for a strumpet!

V

I look for Honor; stay awhile—what hon-
est men are these?
A politician out for plums, a lawyer out
for fees—
Go to! I'll get a lantern and join Dio-
genes!

VI

I look for Gods; I find poor things that
make the angels weep—
Jehovah killing Canaanites and eating
slaughtered sheep,
And Jove debauching women, and Buddha
sound asleep!

VII

Perfection, wisdom, virtue, inspiration,
honor—puff!
They all go up in smoke—they're made of
very fragile stuff—
And yet, I'll find them if I keep on look-
ing long enough!

CAUSE FOR MOURNING

I WAS ware of a pair of turtle-doves that
sat on the maple branch to woo;
That sat on the branch to bill and coo
and whisper their gentle loves.

O soft their plumage and bright their
eyes, their joy the joy of the spring,
new-born!
Then why should they mourn, and mourn,
and mourn, and breathe out their
love in sighs?

"Oh, why do you mourn, dear doves?"
said I, "when cooing and kissing
is all your care?"
And side by side on the maple, there,
they gurgled their sad reply:

"If you had lips that were made of horn,
not warm and tender as lips should
be,
And cooing and kissing were all your
glee, say, wouldn't you mourn and
mourn?"

BUSY EXPLAINING

TELL me, darling, what thou fearest?
Thou art nearest, thou are dearest;
Thou appearest to be queerest when thou lovest me the best!
All thy terror is an error—of my life thou art the sharer—
Thou art altogether fairer, yea and squarer, than the rest.

But you newly act unruly, treating coolly me, yours truly;
You're unduly mean and muley—you are stubbornly unfair.
Explanations you refuse me; you'll abuse me till you lose me!
Please excuse me, but you use me like a doormat. like a chair!

Yes, I called the actress "Cutie," "Frutti-
tutti," "tutti-frutti"—
But I only did my duty when her
beauty thrilled me through;
She is older, she is bolder, than are you,
and she is colder—
But I praised her 'cause her shoulder—
er—reminded me of you!

WILD ROSES

I

ON a sunny summer morning in the middle of July,
When the sun upon the meadows is half-an-hour high;
Walking down the dusty roadway in the country, where you get
Whiffs of jimson-weed and rag-weed through the wealth of "Bouncing-Bet."
The shimmer of the corn blades makes a picture for the eyes—
And the merry dancing crowd of little white-winged butterflies—
Then an odor, stronger, sweeter, than the rest usurps your sense—
Wild roses in the corners of the stake-and-rider fence!

II

The rails are covered over with the twisted berry-vines
And here and there among the leaves a small white blossom shines;
The briers catch and hold you as you vault across the bars,
And the grasses slash your ankles with their verdant scimitars.
What matter? Here's a wonder undiscovered and forlorn,
The sweetest little blossom of all blossoms ever born;
Did you doubt that it was summer? Here's a living evidence—
Wild roses in the corners of the stake-and-rider fence!

III

There are many wondrous blossoms bear
the lovely name of Rose,
The La Frances, and the Beauties, and
the haughty Jaqueminots;
Each holds a myriad petals close in one
great lovely bloom,
Each holds its own rare color, and im-
parts its own perfume.
But here's a little cousin that is sweeter
far than all,
With a single row of petals—if you touch
them they will fall!—
Not all your gold will buy them though
they grow without expense,
Uncared for, in the corners of the stake-
and-rider fence!

IV

O, prototype of modesty—that perfect, subtle charm
Whose very frailty keeps it from a wanton touch of harm!
You do not need those thorns to keep the vandal hand away;
You have no need to hide so shyly by the dusty way:
The white may deepen into pink, the pink may shade to red
For beauty's sake, but not with blushes for a ravished bed;
You tell your innocence to all with mute, sweet eloquence—
Wild roses in the corners of the stake-and-rider fence!

PERHAPS

SOME place, beyond the sea that rolls
  In lands beyond our ken,
They wait—the myriad of souls
  That some day must be men.

And I suppose they treasure up
  A hope, and hold it dear—
That being born is not a cup
  So bitter as they fear;

Just as we treasure, on this earth,
  Our lively, human breath,
Perhaps they're as afraid of birth
  As we're afraid of death!

"OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM"

ONCE there was a bachelor who
moved from flat to flat;
Every house had children, and he
wouldn't stand for that;
Found one where they weren't allowed—
then with rage was torn,
For in the rooms above, one day, there
was a baby born!
Moved into another place—then refused
to stay,
When he noticed children in the house
across the way.

Finally he died, and, as is everybody's
fate,
Found himself a-knocking at St. Peter's
golden gate;
"Can't come in? Why not?" he asked.
Says the Saint, "Oh, dear!
I'm afraid you couldn't stand the way we
run things here;
Children, children, all about—no, it isn't
fair;
You go to the other place—you'll find no
children there!"

JULY

DOWN in the bayou, where the lilies grow—
The pure pond-lilies that are born of mud—
The anchored punt rocks idly to and fro,
July has stilled the current and the blood;
Energy ebbs apace that was at flood
In June, and I would neither swim nor row,
But lie and smoke until the sun is low,
Reach out at times, and pluck a lily bud,
And watch the ford (where cattle move so slow,
Knee-deep, and switch the tail and chew the cud,
And think of naught). I dream of long ago,
And white thoughts bloom in the still even-glow,
Down in the bayou, where the lilies grow—
The pure pond-lilies that are born of mud!

AT THE END

I THINK that when the Judgment Day shall dawn,
The wicked shall be not so much condemned
For the great sins they did in days long gone,
As for the little tides they left unstemmed,
The little kindnesses they left undone,
The faults that in their selfish pride they passed
Shall overwhelm them, each and every one,
More than their great unrighteousness, at last.

I think when that Great Reckoning has
come
The righteous shall be blessed, ah! not
so much
For acts of faith and glorious martyrdom
And crowns snatched from the Devil's
poisoned clutch—
Not for the wound that in the sunlight
bleeds
And bathes in crimson glory all their
lot—
But for those little common daily deeds
Of kindness that they did—and then
forgot!

THE MUSE GONE MAD

I THOUGHT of a sonnet to you, dear,
And I sat down to write it at once;
But it wouldn't remain in the rhythm so plain
That is used in those dignified stunts.
The lines I could use were too few, dear—
At fourteen I'd scarcely a start:
Where the meter should creep it would gallop and leap,
To the jubilant beats of my heart!
It wouldn't be quiet, however I'd try it;
It wanted to fly—it was bound on a riot
Of rhymes that were ever irregular—never
Obeying a rule of the classical school,
But drunkenly reeling with passionate feeling—
The knees of it danced when they should have been kneeling

Till the heavens above and the planets thereof
Seemed echoing, ringing with seraphim, singing
The song of my love!

I can't write a sonnet to you, dear,
For sonnets are calm and sedate,
And that the poor muse cannot do, dear,
When her heart's in a turbulent state.
For how can I fashion it calm and dispassionate,
Under your eye with that maddening flash in it?
No—I must dash in it headlong and furious,
Not of the treasure of measure penurious,
But all in a meter that's sweeter and fleeter
Than carrier doves are—and all filled with curious

Changes of rhyme-scheme and time
scheme—for this
Is the way of my dreams and my
schemes for the bliss
We shall own—we alone—all aroused
by your kiss,
Or the touch of your hand, or the glance
of your eyes,
Or your flashing, transcendent bright
smile that's resplendent
As yon August moon that is hung as a
pendant
By God on the breast of the skies!

AUREA

THE sunshine playing in her hair
Seemed something more than sunshine, there;
For sunshine has one hue, I'm told,
And this had all the tints of gold—
The dull gold, gleaming in the stone
Where it has shone for ages flown;
The red gold in the signet rings
Of ancient Oriental kings;
The virgin gold's bold, tawny tint,
The new coin, glittering from the mint,
And many another golden hue
That golden baubles never knew.

For one bright smile she gave to me
I could not find a simile;
What lay beneath the tenderness
Of those deep eyes, I could not guess.
No snow, no ivory, no pearl,
Were like the forehead of this girl;

No art could say what other thing
Was like the dance bewildering
Of cupids, playing hide-and-seek
Among the dimples of her cheek.
Her form, her grace, but showed how
far
Inadequate expressions are—
Only her hair, I knew, was gold—
Only her heart, I found, was cold!

LUX IN TENEBRIS

I SHALL know, when I am old,
Of a truth,
When my life is growing cold,
What is youth.
I shall learn its wonder, when
I can have it not again.

I shall know, when I am blind,
What is light;
Of its glories, I shall find
Clearer sight.
I shall know the golden day
When its beauties pass away.

Loveless, I shall learn of love,
Deaf, shall hear
Melodies unfathomed of
Lively ear.
And despairing, I shall see
What the joys of hope may be.

So, mayhap, when I am dead,
    And the pain
Bows no more my throbbing head,
    I shall gain
With the knowledge Death can give,
More of life than you who live!

AN AMATEUR

I PIPED amid the autumn woods,
Because I could not come on Pan;
The gods were gone, but all their goods
Were scattered through the solitudes,
And therefore, I, naught but a man,
Played on my pipes, as well as mortals can.

I piped to call the rabbits and
The squirrels to my side;
As Marsyas, I would command
Where, by the autumn breezes banned,
Apollo would not bide;
Therefore I piped through all the woodland wide.

I piped to call the forest things
The wood had made so tame—
Squirrels, and birds with timid wings,
The hare that limps, the lark that sings—
I piped! And beasts with eyes aflame—
Lions and tigers came!

IN THE MONASTERY

I

FATHER Remy, Father Remy! Is the
world so very bad?
Is there naught but sin and sorrow, that
your brow is worn and sad—
That you frown, when past these cloisters
sweep their glittering cavalcades—
Are they naught but vain delusions—
naught but senseless masquerades?

II

Father Remy, Father Remy! Yestereve
I stood awhile,
Watched the pilgrims on the highway
(leaning on the abbey stile),
Caught a glimpse of drooping lashes,
azure eyes, and golden hair!
Caught the scent of dewy roses—Father!
But the world is fair!

III

Then I said a "Miserere" for the sins
that on us fall;
Prayed for grace to Mother Mary (in the
chapel, on the wall),
But the painter, Father Remy, he had
made the Virgin fair—
He had given her drooping lashes, azure
eyes and golden hair.

IV

Father Remy, yestereven, when the An-
gelus had rung,
And I sought my lonely pallet, after
Vespers had been sung,
Then I dreamt of Holy Angels, flying to-
ward me, through the air,
But they all had drooping lashes, azure
eyes and golden hair!

V

Father Remy, Father Remy! Is the world so bad, outside?
Is there naught but lust and murder, evil thoughts and sinful pride?
But, Father! Even if sin and sorrow have their habitation there,
Are there not the drooping lashes, azure eyes and golden hair?

A HUMID NIGHT

HALF the slow night is past and, still awake,
I curse and pray for just one little breeze
To stir the lifeless leaves of those thick trees;
For those low, heavy clouds at last to break
With thunders from their sluggishness, and shake
These breathless meadows into raging seas
Of tossing green—a blessed storm that frees
The tightened pulse and nerves that throb and ache!

Some sound for this curst silence! In the grass
The noisiest insect has been drugged to sleep;
The owl is choked as I, his brother, am.
Two lonesome sounds but deepen the morass
Of stillness—far there bleats a suffering sheep
Near, the dull water rumbles at the dam.

AN IMPOSSIBILITY

I DON'T believe the story that they told
In Hellas ere this age began to be—
How Aphrodite issued from the sea,
Foam-born, but perfect as the waves that rolled
In endless rhythm, musical, but cold
Upon the shores of that strange mystery,
A world without Love. Ay, it seems to me
That dreamers were illogical, of old!

For how could there be shore or sea or land,
Or sky or universe, or night or morn,
Or man to launch his cockles from the strand,
And argosies with gold and wine and corn—
How could this mother-wave have kissed the sand,
Or anything have been, ere Love was born?

A PRISONER

("When looking at the happy autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more."
—Tennyson.)

I DO not wish that I could wander through
The autumn woodlands, as I used to do;
Although the forests call me, call me still,
And the trees shout from every flaming hill—
Beckon with baring boughs—and the brown fields
Speak of the treasure that their stubble yields.
The smell of dead leaves calls me, and the haze
On the horizon dreams of former days—
Talks in its lazy sleep and calls me hence,
And strikes a sharp thrill through my indolence.

And yet, I do not wish that I could go—
Not as I am. The long years, quick or slow,
Have crowded in between these things and me,
And bound me—and will never let me free!
For, though I went unheeded, and could take
A long week, wandering by stream and lake,
I'd still be fettered. Why, each simple joy,
Freely accepted by the growing boy,
Is taken from the man by everything
That holds his life's dull autumn from its spring!
I would throw cudgels at a walnut tree
And bring the green globes tumbling over me;
Rend the wet rinds therefrom, and stain with brown
My hands—and gaily brave my mother's frown!

I want to do these things—but know full
well
I cannot. Why it is, I cannot tell,
But that the thrill is all in memory—
How tasteless the reality would be!

The ripe persimmon, stoned from off the
bough,
Would be less luscious than stuffed olives
now;
The pawpaw were a flat and mushy fruit—
As nasty as that sweet, delicious root
Of sassafras we dug last spring! And all
The sights and sounds and odors of the
fall
Bring keen remembrance. At our very
feet
A feast is spread—and, lo! we may not
eat!
Smell the dead leaves! They call to me,
but no—
My feet are shackled, and I cannot go!

IN VISIONSHIRE

IN Visionshire the sky is blue,
And all the things I meant to do,
And all the joys I might have missed
And all the lips I might have kissed
Wait for me, ever fresh and new!

My unwrit song is sung there, too,
And there my dearest dreams come true—
Ay, more dreams than my heart has wist
In Visionshire!

For roses I shall trade my rue,
And, wandering those gardens through,
Shall find the pathway as I list
Where I may keep that old, old tryst
That long ago I made with you
In Visionshire!

INTUITION

MY heart is a baby that cries for the moon;
My mind is the parent that laughs at its folly,
Oh, give it a rattle, a bowl and a spoon,
A ring, and a patent-unbreakable-dolly!
Feed milk to the heart, Mind, and kiss it and pet it—
Perhaps, in a while, it will sleep and forget it!

But, Heart, let me whisper—refuse thou to grow
To the Intellect's form of eternal denying;
Remain as a child, and at last thou shalt know
The Mother of Hearts giveth ear to the crying.
And the moon shall be thine through the power of her love,
And the waters beneath and the heaven above!

THE NINETEENTH PSALM

THE heavens declare His glory,
The firmament showeth His deeds!
Day unto day tells His story—
Night writes what another night reads!
It needeth not speech for their sermons,
The silence is loud with their song—
The world's end their message determines,
Through aeons long!

The home of the sun is amid them,
Who bursteth on them from above,
From the veils of the night that hath hid them
As a lover approaches his love!
Naught lets him, naught flees, naught withstands him—
He marketh the day and the hour;
And even the Lord, who commands him,
Knoweth his power!

For the law of the Lord is unaltered,
  His judgment is wise and complete;
'Tis the law, O thou soul that hast faltered,
  That bringeth thee wise to His feet!
O God! We are weak! And in terror
  We yield us in ignorant awe—
Grant thou that through wandering and
    error
  We keep thy law!

AUTUMNAL AUTOMORPHISM

THIS time of year, when woods appear
  Wrapped in a smoky haziness,
When more and more our limbs are sore
  With Monday morning laziness;
Close to the ground my body's bound,
  But feeble my resistance is
Against the wind that sweeps my mind
  Across the misty distances.

And so, while I in quiet lie,
  The bonds of sleep unraveling,
My spirit, stirred, flees as a bird
  Beyond the meadows traveling;
Pours its new wine before the shrine
  That duller souls would call a tree,
Where dryads wake, and smiling take
  The fruits of its idolatry!

Then up and on to meet the dawn,
  And swifter than a swallow wing
To dip in streams where frosty gleams
  The mist of morn are following;
Where floating downs from thistle crowns
  On journey's wild and windy, go
To flutter where the frosts prepare
  The wild grape's green and indigo.

Here where the rills baptize the hills
  New to all eyes—or here, amid
The ancient lands where long-dead hands
  Built cenotaph and pyramid,
My spirit flies! My body lies,
  A snared bird that has lost her moor
All drearily, all wearily,
  And snuggles in the Ostermoor!

GETTING OLD

GRAY rock, half hidden in the wood,
Storm stained and calm and cold,
How old are you? A million years?
That's not so very old!

Why, I remember babyhood,
With all its storm and strife
Of infant dreams and ills and fears—
Pray, is not that a life?

I had a boyhood, too—a round
Of childish wars to wage;
O, long, long memories of youth!
And is not that an age?

I had a love, and bliss profound;
And, since she went from me
Has not the waiting been, forsooth,
A whole eternity?

Gray rock, who cares what manifold
Millennia you may see?
I am a hundred times as old
As you can ever be!

THE AUTUMN IMP

THERE'S a tricksy little Pixie, running all about the woods,
If you find him, you may bind him, and confiscate his goods;
He's a smuggler and a juggler, and he'll devastate the land—
He's a meddler, and a peddler—and his goods are contraband!

Down the leafy lanes, the thief, he takes his wicked, wanton way,
And his brushes paint bright blushes on the greens of yesterday;
But beware! His gold is fairy's gold that only lasts a night,
Bring it hither—it will wither to dead leaves before your sight!

Little varlet! All your scarlet is the
blood that speaks of death!
All your painted frauds are tainted with
the poison of your breath,
And, October, when you robe her in your
flaming frock of flame,
You've made easy for the breezy nights to
strip her to her shame!

ONE GOOD DREAM

I DREAMT I went to heaven, and I saw
Folk there that I had never thought to see.

Ah! Not the throng of white-robed saints, who pass
From innocence to immortality,
Untouched of sin, unspotted of the world,
Whose unshamed radiance makes them colorless;
Not singing schools of souls all satisfied
That set me seeking wistfully for friends—
But some I knew and loved in human guise,
And some I had, reluctant, cast aside
For my own reputation's sake, were there;
Some I had labored with, to make them see
The error of their way—then washed my hands

Of them, and seen them take the path my
mind
Told me was evil—they were also there;
And some I knew not, but whom, all at
once,
I loved, because they added warm, bright
hues
To the dead whiteness of eternity!

Oh! there were women whose mistakes
had made
A greater work for perfect love to do;
Whose purity was more than innocence—
Innocence lost, but something better
gained,
Fire-tried and true and holy at the end!
Oh! there were men whose visions had
been wrong,
But who at least had had a vision—and
Their hearts had triumphed where their
brains had erred.

And I was happy. For I much had
feared
A heaven peopled with such brilliant souls
That, could I by some trick or miracle
Win thither, I should be ashamed—and
oh,
So lonesome! My surprise was ecstasy
To find so many very human folk—
Friends, comrades and good fellows! So
I knew
With sudden understanding, why it was
That people called it Heaven—it was so
Blessedly human, and so much like home!

BALLADE À DOUBLE REFRAIN

KEEPER of promises made in spring,
Gilder of squalor in lowly cot—
Ever true and unwavering—
These are the things that Love is not!
This is pretty to round the plot
Of a play, for the playwright knows he must
Tickle our fancies to boil his pot—
For Love is a liar we love to trust!

Passion immortal that poets sing,
Highest of gifts that the gods allot!
Healing balm of affliction's sting—
These are the things that Love is not.
Ay, we would it were so, God wot!
Snatch we at apples that turn to dust!
Learn we wisdom, then? Not a jot,
For Love is a liar we love to trust!

Poets and dramatists! Ye who cling
  Still to the old romantic rot,
Though I am telling a bitter thing,
  These are the things that Love is not!
  Love is a breeze blowing cold and hot,
A young man's fancy—a withering gust
  Yet, let Love call and we rush to the
    spot,
For Love is a liar we love to trust!

L'ENVOI

Princess, I love you! I've quite forgot
These are the things that Love is not;
  'Tis bitter bread, but I beg a crust,
  For Love is a liar we love to trust!

AUTUMN AFIELD

HOW greener is the maple tree, when
half its leaves are red—
How keener is its tracery, when half its
leaves are shed!
How softer is the Autumn path, how
sweeter is the aftermath—
What dreamy haze through forest ways
when Summer days have fled!

The winter's Dian sleeping with the moon-
light chill above her;
The Spring is Psyche creeping to the
sleeping Eros of her—
The Summer is a Venus fraught with pas-
sions hot that come to naught—
But Autumn is a human woman, mother,
wife and lover!

Go build your hut, who love the first, on
Winter's barren heights;
Go dream with Spring, O youths that
thirst for immature delights;
Let him that loves the Summer sing her
kisses and her blossoming—
The fruits are mine, the mellow wine,
through Autumn days and nights!

EX MINIMIS

HERE, where mine eyes are blinded with the smoke,
Here, where mine ears are deafened with the din—
Here where the singing voice can only choke—
Here where the wandering soul is shut within;

Here, city-bound, I see the great round dome
Of heaven that once, I fancy, arched above
The fields I knew that glorified my home—
The hills that in my memory I love

I see one little, lonely bit of blue
From where my city casement mocks the day;
And blocked by brick and stone from all my view
Is all that sky that reaches far away—

But from that little patch, I know the sky,
And from that breath, I know the boundless air;
And from that little thrill within me, I
Know there is endless happiness, out there!

VALE!

IS there any knowing
Where September's going?
Ah, so fast she foots away through the
forests glowing —
Glowing where the leaves and grasses
To a thousand tints are turning;
Where, in gold and scarlet masses,
Moses' bush anew is burning.
Is there any knowing
Whither she is going?

Lo! the moon senescent
Dwindles to her crescent;
In the autumn skies the frosty stars are
incandescent
Through the woods the winds are crying,
On the beach the waves are throbbing—
"Summer's dead and autumn's dying!"
Winds and waves alike are sobbing—
Is there any knowing
Where September's going?

Where the dewdrops writ her
Name with gems a-glitter,
Yesterday, to-morrow will be hoar-frost,
chill and bitter.
She will go, and go forever,
Only shall our hearts remember
That no future years can ever
Bring us back this lost September—
And there is no knowing
Whither she is going!

A BITTER JEST

IT was all a joke, this youth of mine,
It was pure and simple fun;
It went to my head like fumes of wine,
And I laughed till the joke was done;
And still I laughed at the silly strife
That wages through endless days—
At the follies and practical jokes that Life,
The Prince of all Jesters, plays.

I laughed at Love, the impudent boy,
And at Fate, the insolent clown;
The whole world chuckled and grinned
with joy,
And I laughed till the tears ran down.
I laughed till the tears ran hot and fast—
And my eyes and my cheeks are wet,
The Jest is ended, the laugh has passed,
But the tears are flowing yet!

"THE CAVE"

THE giant hand that clove this yawning chasm
Ceased from its task an age of years ago;
The winds have carved it, and the rain and snow
Channeled its walls since that convulsive spasm.
This oak was then primordial protoplasm,
Or what forewent it! Here it stands, and lo!
Its wild and solemn beauty seems to grow
Upon you and your slow enthusiasm.

So wonderfully old and calm! The year
Has clothed its beetling crags with vines of flame;
A hymn of praise should fill you—but, alas!
You curse, or blush ashamed, for even here
The picnicker has hacked his silly name,
And strewed his egg shells and his broken glass!

AFTERGLOW

AS echoes answer when the voice has ceased
To sound; as, when the storm is spent, the rain
Still splashes from the trees; as scents remain
Of withered roses; as a ghost released
Still haunts the tables of his finished feast,
Still seeks the old scenes of his keenest pain;
Or as the sun, sunk 'neath the western plain,
Yet leaves his glory in the shining east—

So, love, I sing of love, though we have said
That love has yielded to a better thing;
Though we have kissed and laid him in his bed,
Wept over him and parted—yet I bring
The same song! Love, my love, though love be dead
How can I know it yet, and how not sing!

A LITTLE AUTUMN SONG

THERE'S a keenness in the air,
When the sun is low;
When the sky is swept and bare,
And the night winds blow;
When the shadows come and go,
Shiver, rise and fall
All along the foggy distance, where the night birds call.

There's a girl—how summer flies!—
Whom I loved of yore,
And the light behind her eyes
Shineth evermore;
So I'm wishing, as before,
For the dusk to fall
Down across the foggy distance, where the night birds call.

Ah, my love! Can I forget,
  As the seasons come,
As they go, that even yet
  Hearts cannot be dumb?
  Some are fast in ice, but some
Weep, as shadows fall
  Down upon the foggy distance, where
    the night birds call!

LABIA MEA APERIES

WHEN stars of an autumn night
Shine clear till the edge of dawn,
And frost, in the darkness white,
At a touch of the sun is gone;
When woods, with their flags unrolled,
Scarlet and green and gold,
Burst on the waking sight,
And shout of the treasure they hold—
The treasures that gleam and shine
Behind the forest's door,
The wild grape's purple wine,
And the chestnut's bristled store;
When the last October days
On our heartstrings start to thrum,
And the tongue is moved to praise
That summer had stricken dumb—
When the honey of all the year
From its bursted casket drips,
O Thou of the woods, give ear—
O Lord, open thou my lips!

THE MERIDIAN

"There is a movement among navigators and astronomers to change the accepted meridian from its present situation, on account of the defective position of the Greenwich observatory. It is proposed to adopt generally the meridian of Bethlehem, in Judea."—Sunday Paper.

HO! ye wild mariners, who've steered
The same old course so long—
Answer us—have ye never feared
Your reckonings were wrong?
"How far from Greenwich?" Can you plan
For a new theorem,
And use a new meridian—
"How far from Bethlehem?"

Ye yachtsmen in the Social Swim,
Who fix your weary eyes
On London shallows, fogged and dim,
As they were Paradise—

What boot these barren shores, how far
  Or near ye sail to them?
How stand ye with the Ancient Star—
  How far from Bethlehem?

And ye who drive your slavers out,
  Or golden galleys in—
Ye modern pirates, stanch and stout,
  Respectable in sin—
A tempest rises in the west,
  A tide ye may not stem!
Ah, fools! How vain your rainbow quest,
  How far from Bethlehem!

O Science, groping for the light,
  With faith thrown overboard!
O Students! Are your figures right—
  Are all your books explored?
O Dogma, sailing by a creed—
  Ere ye our hopes condemn,
Are chart and compass all ye need?
  How far from Bethlehem?

BALLADE OF AUTUMN

AND Autumn comes—not as the Spring,
  With song of birds and breath of cheer;
No pageants to its passing bring
  The dying year.
  No shout of triumph fills the ear,
No cry of sorrow, even, to lend
  A note of change—but dull and drear
Our Summers end!

And Autumn comes with whispering,
  So softly that we cannot hear
The voiceless dirge she seems to sing
  By Summer's bier.
  And if the leaves to-day are sere,
Were yesterday's much greener? Mend
  Your phrase! When have you seen appear
"Our Summer's end?"

And Autumn comes, not with the sting
  Of sharp regret, or sudden veer
Of winds—a soft, disguisèd thing
  That sheds no tear.
  She's finished half of her career
Ere we begin to comprehend
  That she has come, and brought us near
Our Summer's end!

L'ENVOI

And Autumn comes! But we, my dear,
  Care not, for she has been our friend
And taught us we need never fear
  Our Summer's end!

IN OCTOBER

A LEAFLESS tree is not a cheerless thing,
Nor frozen ground, nor biting cold, nor snow;
Winter is good to look at, all men know,
As summer is, or even as the spring.
But be the tree half-bare, with leaves that cling
Uneasily, sport of the winds that blow,
How dreary is the picture! All our woe
Is in the passing—not the burying.

Life is a wondrous pleasure; and in death
There is no sorrow, for no pain is there—
But oh! the dying one we weep above!
Love blesses all who feel his tender breath.
Who lack love, know it not, and cannot care—
But oh! the drear October of a love!

MIRACLES

EVEN in winter time, the whole of the world
Appears so full of life—indeed,
Seems made of life—the blossom and the seed,
The thistledown, wind-whirled,
The crackling branches, and the snowy ground;
The street crowds, full of rush and sound—
That it seems strange to me that men
Should count the thing a miracle,
Unheard of and impossible,
That any dead should ever live again.

That is not strange—look at this constant strife,
The fallen things that rise, the restless ocean
Of things that are, in everlasting motion;
Creation's either naught at all, or—Life.

And if the dead live not again, in what
Hid, loathsome spot—
What noisome dust heap, fouling endless
space,
Does all this vain material lie and rot—
Say, has infinity a room for such a place?

Not thus could He that lives in all things
blunder,
That life should find its own once more,
That is no greater cause for wonder,
Than that day follows night that goes
before.
But this would be the miracle,
Inexplicable and unnatural—
To find that, anywhere beneath the sky,
What lives could ever die!

TEMPTATION

I KNOW a covered alley with a gutter down the middle,
And a torrent in the gutter it would sicken you to think of;
And I know a little canyon with a rill that is a riddle
In its origin and ending—that a dainty elf might drink of!
And the one I tread by daytime, and the other when I'm dreaming—
Oh, the stench that fills the alley! Oh, the canyon's jeweled gleaming!

I know a fairy country, past the blue hills 'way out yonder,
Where Life's a lovely vision and where Death can never enter;
And I know an ugly city where my weary feet will wander
With the other messy maggots struggling toward a festering center;

I know them both—and here amid the
slimy slough I linger
While every willow beckons with its dew-
cleansed pointing finger!

The ugly things are keeping me from
what is merely pretty;
The Lord above is Father, but the dirt
is still my Mother;
And God is in the country, but Mankind
is in the city,
And God is only Father, after all—but
Man is Brother!
The brooks, the canyons, call to me with
words no tongue can utter,
But how shall I be washed while one is
lying in the gutter?

BALLADE OF CHRISTMAS WEEK

THOU shalt not, in the coming week,
From poverty withhold thine hand;
Ten thousand children's voices speak
To mind thee of the Lord's command.
Poor babes! How can they understand
Why cold should bite and hunger gnaw?
(O Lord, have mercy on us, and
Incline our hearts to keep this law!)

Thou shalt remember, when the meek
Christ's birth is hailed throughout the land.
How as a child He came to seek
This wide-eyed, hopeful, helpless band.
Not for thyself this day was planned,
But these, that feel the purer awe—
(O Lord, have mercy on us, and
Incline our hearts to keep this law!)

Thou shalt search out where dwellings bleak
  Make revenue for dwellings grand—
Where noisome courts and alleys reek
  And stamp us with greed's shameful brand;
  Childhood is there! Whose woe has spanned
The years since He lay in the straw—
  (O Lord, have mercy on us, and
Incline our hearts to keep this law!)

Thou, who with equal eye hast scanned
  Both plutocrat and pariah,
O, Lord! Have mercy on us, and
  Incline our hearts to keep Thy law!

ALONE

HE stood alone in Nazareth,
He walked alone by Galilee;
Alone He crossed the unknown sea
We darkly know as Death.

Whatever path those others trod,
They had Him ever at their side;
Alone He had no human guide—
Alone, He trusted God!

Ah! We would seek a martyr's throne
But that we know what it would mean,
Pain we might bear, however keen,
But dare not be alone!

A CHRISTMAS MELODY

THERE are tales that lose their meaning with the changing of the times
And become at last the curious burden of forgotten rhymes:
While the world's demand for deeds grows large and larger every day,
And we turn our backs on fabled lore, and cast our myths away.
But no matter how new problems fill the circle of our earth—
No matter how old tales are lost as things of little worth,
There is one legend that each wintertide makes doubly dear—
The story of the Christ-child waxes sweeter year by year.

Ah, louder still and louder grows the song
the angels sang,
And clearer sound the seraph's notes
across the fields that rang:
And dearer seems the message that the
shepherds thought so sweet,
And brighter shines the star that led them
to a Baby's feet!
Not the centuries of darkness o'er the
nations born and dead
Can dim the aureole that gleams about
the Mother's head;
For still the Kings and Wise Men of the
world bow down to Her
Whose memory still is fragrant of the
Frankincense and Myrrh!

Living truth or lovely fable, there's a deeper meaning lies
Close around that lowly stable, as each year grows old and dies:
And each mother knows the secret as no priest or prophet could,
Of the glory of the holiness that lives in babyhood.
Wherever smiles a new-born child, haps the same wondrous thing—
Godhood and manhood meet again to crown a future king;
Wherever mother clasps her babe, that bright Star shines on them—
Wherever rocks a cradle is another Bethlehem!

O mystery of Motherhood! O miracle of birth!
O magic of the Childhood song that heralds peace on earth!
Lean low, celestial choristers, and sweep the clouds away,
And chant a grander anthem still to greet this Christmas Day!
A new song to the children, at whose feet, just as of old,
The wise men and the kings lay gifts of incense and of gold,
Sing loud—and yet to us will be, while life, while love endures,
The laughter of these little ones a sweeter song than yours!

DANSE MACABRE

CHOOSE your partners! Take your
places!
'Tis the wildest dance—the last!
Now again unmask your faces—
Tear therefrom the flesh's cast!
Hark, the hautboy's eerie blast
Echoes from the sexton's hut;
Up! The night is nearly past—
Here's a dance you cannot cut!

Now, with hideous grimaces,
Death, the old Iconoclast,
Puts the party through its paces,
Sets the tempo sharp and fast;
Gleam the eyeballs, sick and glassed,
Blares the brass and shrieks the gut—
To it, friend! Why stand aghast?
Here's a dance you cannot cut!

Ho, thou beau with airs and graces,
  Show us now what steps thou hast!
Soon thou'lt whirl through endless spaces—
  Hell's broad ballroom's chill and vast!
Here the gibbering crowd is massed,
  Where the graveyard gates are shut;
Trip it, old enthusiast—
  Here's a dance you cannot cut!

Prince! Your grave is filled and grassed;
  Hasten, ere the last worm glut
On your last lone bioplast—
  Here's a dance you cannot cut!

A REFLECTION

SEARED by the years, and disillusioned by
The disappointments that arrive each day
Just as expected, yet each year I try
At Christmas time, when I am fain to say,
"Would it were over!" something of the joy
And something of the eagerness to borrow
That plucks the heart strings of my little boy,
Who asks, each evening, "Will it be tomorrow?"

Shame on the aging nerves that grudge the strain!
Shame on the hardening heart that beats so slow!
What sort of business makes the sluggish brain

A mere machine that grumbles to and fro?
A pity that the future is too near—
A pity that the past should be too far —Oh
So far too far!—to understand the sheer,
Dumb yearning of that "Will it be tomorrow?"

He has no calendar, that little lad—
To him, some random power pricks the date
On which his straining spirit shall be glad;
In trusting blindness he can only wait!
Just as, O Father, who dost hold the key
That shall unlock the gates of earthly sorrow,
We children in our ignorance ask of thee
Of the last rapture, "Will it be tomorrow?"

THE OLD VIGIL

WAITING for Spring! Why, we begin to wait
Before the frosts have killed the autumn leaves;
Before the housetops bear their earliest freight
Of snow that melts and overflows the eaves.
Waiting for Spring! The birds that stay with us,
And those that leave us, on reluctant wing,
Ay, all look forward to the Winter thus—
A cold room where we sit and wait for Spring!

Waiting for Spring! Somehow, a man begins
Soon as the Maytime of his life's at end,
To wait another. And if wanhope wins,
God teach him what he cannot comprehend!
God, who hast sent the Springtime's song and psalm,
Open our eyes to this so wondrous thing—
Grant us to sit in faith's unshaken calm,
Through life's December, waiting for the Spring!

THE MIGHTY ATOM

HE walks along the crowded street,
from home unto his work,
One of the multitudes that meet and pass
and creep and lurk—
One of the dreary many, bound from sordidness to care,
Not more nor less than any, found here,
there or anywhere.

An ant in scores of anthills—cog in a
million wheels—
He thinks and moves and feels, but not
more than another feels;
He loves, he hopes—each does the same,
but who is he or they
Apart from the gigantic game that all
the world must play?

He walks along the dirty street he never
went beyond,
One of the crowd that he may meet,
bound to them with a bond;
And yet—he thinks of Socrates, he specu-
lates of Mars—
He who has never planted trees wanders
among the stars!

He who is born to leaden days lives in
the golden years,
Slinks through an alley's noisome ways—
for Heloise sheds tears!
An atom, man? A mere unknown, un-
knowing part of things?
Time and eternity are his—love, space,
and angels' wings!

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